

THE OXFORD CONSUMER

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OXFORD CONSUMERS GROUP

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See inside cover

THE OXFORD CONSUMERS GROUP

(The oldest local group in the country)

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LETTER

Dear Katy,

Some of your readers, even OCG members, may still not have heard that on July 4 last the Royal Mail raised the cost of sending airmail letters to the USA and the rest of the world except Europe, from 45p for 10gms to 47p.

And why haven't they heard of the increase? Because the GPO failed to publicise it properly, and I myself only heard of it about ten days after July 4, when an American friend called.

I immediately made enquiries in Oxford post offices. I could see no poster about it in the GPO, St Aldate's. I asked an assistant, who eventually produced a 36-page booklet. I would rather have had a small card just showing the new rates, eg a 20gms airmail letter is now 68p, and heavier ones

higher by between 5p and 21p. But air letters remain at 40p (or £2.20 for a pack of 6, a saving of over 61/2p per air letter).

There are also increases on inland items weighing more than 350gms. 20gms letters to Europe remain at 37p, the price of an E-stamp, which is reasonable for a letter to Siberia (in Europe according to the PO!) but a lot for a letter from say Belfast to Dublin. Apparently some people still think that a first-class stamp is enough for Europe, though the two rates were separated about five years ago - again with minimal publicity. So the new booklet tells them in heavy type that letters to Europe cost 37p.

Yours etc
M. Hugh Jones

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QUALITY IS MAKING ITS MARK WITH OXFORDSHIRE FIRMS

A special article by Emily James, Trading Standards

Have you ever required a builder, but didn't know who to ask?

Oxfordshire Trading Standards had for some time been looking for a scheme to reduce the number of complaints about cowboy builders. The service originally drafted its own scheme, but when the Department of Trade and Industry offered to launch the scheme in Oxfordshire the service felt it was the way to go forward.

The Quality Mark Scheme is run by the Department of Trade and Industry and links reputable businesses and consumers via a local rate telephone number and website. It has the aim of "Combating the Cowboys" and encouraging consumers to make an informed choice.

The scheme was launched in June in Oxfordshire to 75 traders in the home repair and maintenance sector - builders, electricians, roofers, damp-proofers, heating engineers, plumbers, plasterers, joiners etc - and will be launched to consumers when a core number of traders have joined.

In order to join the scheme, traders undergo an assessment* which tests:

- Technical competence
- Qualifications, skills and experience
- Compliance with the Quality Mark Code of Practice
- Financial Stability
- The level of public liability insurance
- The existence of a complaints procedure

Businesses also have to provide the Quality Mark insurance backed warranty and pay £500 to

register for an assessor (who usually takes a day) and the administration of the scheme.

The launch in Oxfordshire has generated a lot of interest from the trade, and applications are starting to come through. The main role now, for the Trading Standards Service and the District Council's Building Control, is to encourage businesses to join the scheme and ensure that the profile of the scheme is kept high among the trade.

If you are aware of a business which may be interested in joining the Quality Mark Scheme, please put them in touch with the Trading Standards Service. Entry to the scheme is free of the £500 fee, for the first 50 businesses who apply.

* We note, in the DTI guide to the scheme, further details likely to interest our readers:

Quality Mark member firms must have "at least one skilled operative for every two unskilled operatives";

they must "automatically provide up to 6-year warranty cover on all domestic work, including insolvency and poor workmanship" (but is "up to" a let-out?);

they must "act in a courteous manner and respect clients' privacy and property";

they must "comply with statutory waste requirements" and "dispose of all waste safely, particularly hazardous waste".

We are sure that if or when the scheme gets under way it will attract consumers.

OUR LIST OF RECOMMENDED SERVICES

We have, as members know, a list of places or people recommended by at least one of our members to our officer-in-charge: stores, shops, professionals or just people willing to do odd jobs well. We once kept it confidential, but in spring and summer 2000 we printed an updated though abridged version. Headings ran "Acupuncture... Alarms, Security.. Antiques & Jewellery.. Aromatherapy... Baker..." and so on. We didn't, obviously, include the name of each recommending member, although this is an important entry on each index-card, since we don't accept advertisements from traders themselves, and, on the other hand, OCG itself cannot take legal responsibility for recommendations passed on.

We have had in the past several offers to help in putting the card-index onto database, but it is doubtful whether that would now get past the office of Data Protection. But what we must appeal for now is someone, not necessarily computerate, who is prepared to take the card-index over from Patricia Afford. She has been the officer in charge

of it for over seven years, and has loved the job; we never forget her 1999 remark, "it is wonderful when joyful ladies ring me back!" But she feels now, to her regret and ours, that it is time for her to hand it over.

All that is needed is a telephone, a clear head, an ability to spell, and an ear to the ground. The job is ideal for a member preferring to stay home rather than go to meetings, but who enjoys receiving can-you-help-me calls from other members, doing what she can to help them, and encouraging feedback. Some updating is needed, if the officer is told, or senses, that a card is or may be out of date, since firms may well not know that they are on our list, and so will not tell us if they change their address or even go out of business. But that can be done when and as it suits the officer.

Please tell the Chairman or Editor if you might be interested, or if there is anything more you might like to know first. Meanwhile, thank you very much, Patricia, for your seven years' faithful service.

THE OXFORD LOCAL PLAN 2001- 2016: ADD SALT

We were quite impressed by this Plan, or at least what it cautiously calls its First Draft. Public consultation has been wide and often listened to; attention has been paid to people's dreams, hates and loves. Much, of course, cannot yet be final, pending decisions for instance on the Headington and Marston Area Transport Strategy (HAMATS), the Westgate Partnership's proposals and the relocation of the railway station. And much of the bulky volume (£40 to private individuals) consists of advice and warnings to would-be developers; what the City Council proposes to allow or not to allow, rather than what it proposes to do.

But there are some sensible attitudes to problems, some discreet indications of ways in which the Council can tackle them, and some good forward-looking ideas. We can recommend the dish for general consumption, if taken with a pinch of salt.

General

The Draft notes that Oxford has now "a resident population of approximately 145,000" and an estimated student population of 25,000 (although p108 raises this figure to 27,000, not counting "private colleges", and apparently also forgetting the College of Further Education). But the city has "a high level of in-commuting, with about half its workforce living outside its boundary" and with over 5 million visitors a year. It has "high levels of unemployment, multi-occupation and homelessness"; and meanwhile there are also the "architectural heritage", "natural heritage" and "a concentration of Sites of Special Scientific Interest". The complications to be dealt with are evident.

Pp10-11 recognise that "residential development is vital", "both affordable and smaller dwellings" (the distinction is not clear, and the later section on Housing, after blinding the reader with figures, seems to suggest a three-digit rather than a four-digit yearly target for new dwellings in Oxford). P10 envisages also "more and smaller retail, commercial and employment spaces" and "more mixed-use developments". P13 sees "no need for any new out-of-town sites" requiring travel by car; but (p14) "a limited amount of greenfield land has been allocated for particular developments" (however, a later chapter will treat the Green Belt).

Developments, says p18, should not "harm the privacy, light, outlook or security of occupiers of adjoining properties", and all new development should (p20) provide adequate lighting, "natural surveillance of public spaces", and "reasonable" access, parking and toilet facilities. "Particular attention will be given" to sources of noise (p25) and to telecommunication masts (p26).

Transport

The Oxford Transport Strategy, says p30, "focuses primarily on access into the city centre ... The principles behind the OTS have been extended to address specific traffic problems in Headington

and Marston ". This chapter says little about solutions, but (p34) "the City Council will seek to establish new or improved linkages towards the city centre from Barton, Risinghurst, Horspath, Blackbird Leys and Littlemore". P35 mentions 21 cycle routes, new or needing improvement, even one "between Jackdaw Lane and Abingdon Road via a new bridge over the River Thames" for cyclists and pedestrians only. (Just where?).

In the city centre, says p36, "the City Council wishes to continue to exclude buses from Cornmarket Street and to introduce similar restrictions in Queen Street" (p131 refers only to "daytime pedestrianisation" of Queen Street). "However", continues p36, "it is vital to ensure that the attractiveness of the bus is not undermined. For this reason, the City Council supports improvements to bus priority measures. In order to facilitate the removal of buses from Queen Street, the alternative route of Old Greyfriars Street and Castle Street will be protected for bus priority".

Planning applications for developments "likely to have significant transport implications" must include transport assessments and travel plans.

The Guided Transit Express service, with buses running along railway tracks to and from northern, eastern and southern points, appears on p37 as a definite prospect: it "will follow the rail corridor and will leave the track at Oxford station, where it will switch to road to serve the city centre". It "has been the subject of a feasibility study which has established that the project is practical in engineering terms". On new Park & Ride sites, other than number 5 south of Kidlington, "there are no proposals ... as part of the current OTS programme"; but "the County Council is investigating..."

"The Natural Environment"

In general the Green Belt is to be retained, and watercourses are to be conserved or improved. There is no particular mention here of the idea of a Worcester Street canal basin. P177 says cautiously, "To re-open part of this site as an active canal basin would potentially require raising the bridge formed by Hythe Bridge Street to allow boat access to the basin. This requires further technical investigation".

"The Historic Environment"

P58 says firmly, "Planning permission will not be granted for any development which would have an unacceptable effect on a nationally important monument (irrespective of whether it is scheduled) or its setting", and reckons Oxford to have "over 1500 listed buildings".

Housing

Possible sites appear to be a small part of the Castle site; the site of the British Telecom building in Paradise Street; and, for student accommodation,

part of the Cowley Road bus depot and of St Clement's car-park. P81 warns that if accommodation intended for students "becomes available on the open market, it has the potential of becoming slum dwellings". P82 concedes that "there may be a limited role for Houses in Multiple Occupation", and the City Council "will consider granting permission" for existing buildings to be changed to this use.

The Economy

This section gives to "employment-generating sites" such encouragement as all the other safeguards permit, and emphasises the availability of the Oxford Science Park at Littlemore and the Oxford Business Park at Cowley.

"Health and Hospitals"

"A key part" of NHS strategy, says p99, is the relocation of the Radcliffe Infirmary and Rivermead to Headington, and of Mental Health services to Littlemore. The City Council considers also that "there would be considerable benefits in relocating the Ambulance Service" to a suitable site still to be identified. The Acland Hospital too "has planning permission to relocate". We detect, throughout this chapter, some readiness to give the hospitals siting priority over Oxford Brookes University; as for Oxford University's need of sites to pursue medical research, p101 seems to suggest that they and Brookes can be left to fight it out between themselves. P100, while not going as far as Oxford Consumers Group might wish in stressing the need for adequate public transport, nevertheless recognises that such transport will "help to reduce the demand for unnecessary travel by car".

"Education"

This chapter devotes itself chiefly to circumstances in which planning permission "will only be granted" or "may be granted" for new children's nurseries or development of private schools. Limited development permission will be granted to the College of Further Education and to Brookes University. Oxford University is encouraged to use the Radcliffe Infirmary site, other smaller sites, and "part of a mixed-use development at Oxford Station when" (not "if") "the Station relocates to Oxpens".

"Sport, Outdoor Recreation and Community Facilities"

These receive prudent encouragement; they must not cause loss of existing facilities, and must be "realistically accessible". We find no mention of any new swimming pool.

"Retail and Commercial Leisure"

Proposals must "retain and enhance" the current pattern, eg the "distinctive character" of the Covered Market and of the High Street east of the Turl. Going off at a slight tangent, p135 "supports proposals for development of a dual-use building

for a Concert Hall and Conference Facility as part of a mixed-use development of the Oxpens site".

Tourism

This too (p138) must "preserve and enhance the cultural heritage resources of Oxford" and "promote alternatives to the private motor car". But the Council encourages "improvements" to Park & Ride sites, "additional hotel provision", and suitable "additional visitor attractions".

There follow 36 pages, the longest section of the Draft, which go through possible "Development Sites" in alphabetical order. We notice particularly that "planning permission will be granted":

For a coach drop-off and pick-up point at Albion Place. (We know, however, that some Albion Place residents are very unhappy about this; see p6).

For a mixed-use development in Hythe Bridge Street.

For residential, employment and leisure developments at Lucy's Factory site, Walton Well Road.

For retail, commercial leisure and arts-related developments at the Odeon Cinema, George Street.

For up to ten different uses of the Oxpens area, Park End Street and the Railway Station area.

A Big But...

The Structure Plan - both the county and the city sections - is taking a lot of time and effort to compile. It is full of well-meaning platitudes, aspirations, good intentions, but no very definite promises or projects. The Government however has already announced that it is going to revamp planning law so that local authorities have less power to hold up or stop development. Eight regional assemblies are already operating and can lay down planning policy. What then is the point of continuing to produce a Local Plan at this level? Perhaps this is the reason behind the draft's lack of bite. Perhaps we should be told what the South-Eastern Assembly plans for us.

Postscript

Two Projects Group members attended a "Local Plan Workshop" at the Town Hall on 24 July, arranged and introduced by the North East Area Committee (formerly the Area Committee for Headington etc) but open to anyone. The intention was that the evening should take the shape of the one reported in our Spring number under the heading "Hospitals, Brookes and the Local Plan". With the help of planning officers, each table was invited to "report back the top three aspects of the Plan that are liked and the top three other comments".

It didn't work out that way; some 30 people came, many representing local groups, but the Plan is so wide-ranging that they had to take up all the facilitators' time with requests for elucidation. However, abundant forms had been supplied "for supporting or objecting to the Plan", if necessary at an Inquiry; but we were invited to use them for even minor comments by individuals, and many of

us did so. Your Editor was even encouraged to put in her point (see p4) that estimates of student members were inconsistent; it should, she was told, be classed as an objection with a request that the figures be amended. She overheard indications of eagerness to keep greenfield sites in

Headington, and of concern about reduced space for parking, while the Guided Transport project was not favoured everywhere. But we were assured that all comments would be given weight, and "if no comments are made, that will have quite a lot of weight".

OTHER PLANNING MATTERS

Coaches in St Giles

Apart from its mentions of Albion Place and Oxpens, the Local Plan does not tackle directly either the problem of coach-parking or the future of St Giles Street. But feeling has not subsided, and was vocal at a public meeting in Rewley House on 27 June. The County Council, we were told, was using this forum to undertake consultation and explore potential solutions. Nearly 80 people attended.

The Tourist Officer reported her market-research. Tourist numbers fell by 40% during 1997-2000, probably because of the strong pound. A tourist's average length of stay was 3 1/2 hours, average expenditure £23, average age 45 or over. No statistics of enforcement of parking regulations were available, since records had not separated coaches from cars. (Sensation).

Peter Mann, the County Council's Group Manager for Transport Planning, explained that the City Council is still responsible for off-street parking-places, the tourist economy and environmental issues; but the County is now responsible for traffic-management and on-street parking. Parking is therefore a joint responsibility. Park & Ride is not a solution to the coaches-in-St-Giles problem. (From the floor: why not?)

John Cramer, the County's Principal Engineer for Major Projects, asked the audience whether he should make permanent the Experimental Order (permitting 20-minute waits by coaches in specified parts of the street) or go back to the status quo ante. Albion Place has space for only 4 coaches. Oxpens has space for only 38, and its future depends on that of the railway station. (A coach operator added that it is not practical for coaches from the north; several others present pointed out that the walk from it is not likely to appeal to tourists). The Westgate plan would not replace Gloucester Green bus station; it would provide only new stops. Use of Keble Road could be only part of a general solution.

Animated questions and comments from the floor went on for nearly half an hour beyond the scheduled close of the meeting, but threw up chiefly two problems: that of Albion Place residents, and that of enforcement - it hasn't worked for thirty years, said Councillor Maureen Christian. "A useful exchange of views", concluded the Chairman.

Stop Press. We quote with extreme interest the *Oxford Times* of 26 July: "Plans to create permanent coach parking bays in St Giles have been

abandoned by councillors... At a public meeting last month ... both city and county councillors realised the issue required sensitive handling..." The current experimental order will lapse on 17 September, "and while in future coaches will still be able to use St Giles, they will not be directed to special bays". It remains to be seen how and indeed whether enforcement will work; but certainly "heated debate" works.

Broad Street

We remind readers that Oxfordshire County Council's Legal Services, County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND, invites comments by a new closing date, 17 September, on the experimental parking arrangements in Broad Street east of The Turl. 25 vehicles (not merely 17, as specified earlier) may park for 30 minutes between 8 am and 6.30 pm (with no return till after an hour, but with no limit between 6.30 pm and 8 am).

We are sure that readers have views on other aspects of Broad Street - perhaps even on the arrangements for disabled parking, cycle and motor-cycle parking, pay-and-display, vehicle loading and access, which were offered in November 2001 for comment by 4 January 2002. And we hear that a "total plan" is under consideration. But we mustn't confuse the County's Legal Services.

The City Planning Department

The promised trial opening of Ramsay House foyer on Saturday mornings did take place in the autumn, and in fact went on till the end of June. But it didn't justify itself; an average of 8 people came, once only 2, and only half of them wanted to look at plans; the rest had merely tourist enquiries. Ah well, we tried to get it for people, but if they don't want it... For desperate folk, busy five days a week, most City plans are now on the internet.

Roundabout and Swings

In our previous issue (160) a member floated the idea of traffic lights at the Heyford Hill roundabout on the ring road, to make it easier to get in and out of Sainsburys. We have since sounded out both the store and the County Council, who are the highway authority. The local store management said problems in getting out onto the roundabout were mainly at the peak traffic times in the morning and evening, and anything which eased that situation would be a good thing. Any definite plan would of course have to go to their property department in London.

The County Council told us that at the moment the ring road was still trunked and therefore the responsibility of the Highway Agency. However, they expect to take it over by April 2003, and already have some plans for making it a little safer, though the trouble [spot.is](#) not the Sainsburys entrance/exit. The dual carriageway ring road from the Abingdon Road roundabout swings left at Heyford Hill, and traffic in the outside lane swings left too, cutting across traffic in the inside lane wanting to branch off to Henley or the supermarket. The County are proposing to rethink the lane marking in the lead up to the junction, and it may be that something could be done to help the

Sainsburys problem. Over the last five years there have been 3 serious and 46 slight accidents at the roundabout, according to police figures. This is on a par with the Green Road roundabout on the London Road.

Part-time traffic lights have not proved very successful in other locations; if the situation can instead be improved by careful thought and cans of white paint, then this solution will be quicker and cheaper. The volume of traffic through Green Road, however, demands full-time lights and demolition and money. We shall keep in touch with the County over these issues. If you have any views, do let us know.

SHOPPING MADE EASY (?): MAIL-ORDER AND INTERNET

Our June questionnaire brought in very illuminating replies from 52 respondents. We are very grateful to all those who took the trouble to write.

Respondents. 4 readers sent in nil-returns - "I like to see and handle what I buy" - while 6 others use mail order for only one item from a favoured company or society. These low numbers are probably not all, since more abstainers than addicts would have thought it not worth while to reply. But it is quite clear that a large number of our members find mail-order shopping convenient and satisfying.

10 respondents were men; this probably indicates nothing except perhaps a tendency among men to leave shopping (or OCG membership?) to their wives. One respondent is an NCF officer living well outside our area, but who gets a complimentary copy of our magazine: we note with interest his comment: "I am working on mail order problems... An article should appear in either the next Consumer News or the one after, following further research".

In reply to the questions "What sort of thing do you buy by post?" and "What have you bought through the post since 1/9/01?" one reader contentedly replied "Most things"! Clothes, including shoes, came out top, with 35 responses; Christmas cards, calendars and wrapping-paper were next with 24, while "gifts" got 9. Garden items, mostly plants, scored 14, but with critical comments to be noted later; kitchenware 13; other gadgets, such as shoe-racks and computer-parts, 9; books, 8. Health items got only 2 mentions, though "toiletries" got 4; and food got only 2 mentions, though wine got 3 more - doubtless transit-times and delivery problems are a consideration. Only one respondent uses mail-order for travel or holidays.

A later question, "How did you pay"? was included as much to tell us about our members as to throw light on problems they might mention. 31 used credit cards, 25 used cheques; these categories overlap, since quite a number used both methods as circumstances suggested. One preferred a debit-card, and two had accounts. No one used a PO -

they're rarely worth the money now - and one queried our word-processor's abbreviation po. So did the Editor, but word-processors are obstinate creatures; ours couldn't grasp her postcode either.

Companies and charities patronised. What was surprising was the long and varied list of these. We were certainly justified in noting a "crescendo", though one respondent criticised our use of "a crescendo at Christmas" and would have preferred "a climax". (The Editor wishes she could be sure that Christmas junk mail through her own letter-box marks a climax and not just a crescendo). Our 52 respondents mentioned 106 charities or companies, and among these only 29 were mentioned by more than one respondent! Our readers certainly range widely. 16 bodies were mentioned by more than 2; these, in alphabetical order, are:

Ambrose Wilson, 53 Dale Street, Manchester, M60 6ES
Andre De Brett, Brett House; Steeton, Keighley, BD20 6RA (01274-568211)
Damart, Bowling Green Mills, Lime Street, Bingley, BD971AD (01274 568211- the same as De Brett!)
Hawkshead Retail Ltd, 70 Berners Street, London, W1P 3AE (020-7636-8040)
Hotter, Liverpool Road, Skelmersdale, WN8 8AX, or Edwin House, Cornwall Road, South Wigston, Wigston, LE18 4XH
Lakeland Limited (formerly Lakeland Plastics), Alexandra Buildings, Windermere, LA231BQ (01539-488100)
Land's End UK Ltd, Land's End Way, Oakham, LE15 6UF (01572-722553)
Nightingale, Nightingales House, Long Lane, Craven Arms, Shropshire, SY7 8DU (0870-601-2415)
Orvis, Vermont House, Unit 30A, North Way, Andover, SP10 5RW
Patra Selection Ltd, 1-5 Nant Road, Childs Hill, London, NW2 2PS
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, The Lodge, Sandy, Lane, G19 2DL (01767-680551)
Save the Children (Sales) Ltd, PO Box 40, Burton upon Trent, DE14 3LQ (020-7703-5400)

Telegraph Group (including Selective /Telegraph Books), 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5DT (020-7538-5000)

Thompson & Morgan, PO Box 99, Sudbury, C010 2YE (01473-688588)

Times Newspapers Ltd, 1 Pennington Street, London, E1 9XN (0870-122-6916 or 6918)

Unicef, 64-78 Kingsway, London, WC2B 6NB

We note that none of these bodies is in the Oxford area, at least according to The Yellow Pages, but of course that makes sense; if our respondents could visit, no doubt many of them would do so. Some of the firms do have shops, eg Lakeland at Stratford-upon-Avon and Nightingale at Winchcombe.

The clear winner is Lakeland, with 12 favourable mentions and no criticisms by anyone: "I would specially recommend Lakeland Limited for quality of goods and excellent service"; "a model company ... very conscientious"; "generally first-class products, and if any is not they accept returns at any time (eg a year later!)". Then come Damart and Land's End, each with 9 bouquets, and each with only one mildly dissenting voice, eg "delivery is usually by Parcelforce, but when is never certain..."

We shall come back in a moment to that criticism; but a few more compliments should be quoted. "Land's End - very quick and efficient and helpful, and they will hem trousers to your choice of length". "J.D. Williams are almost alone in stocking every width and size of shoe. They also have an excellent returns service without any questions asked". "I would never use any company other than Flying Flowers for gifts of flowers". "Not having many shops in Oxford selling larger-sized clothes, I find mail-order catalogues a good source for purchasing them".

Customer satisfaction. 23 respondents seemed to be fully satisfied under all our three headings: goods, service, and "would you recommend?" "If you send your money with the order, problems only arise if the goods are not sent or there are exchanges", said our NCF correspondent, rather sweepingly; "most firms have good accounting systems ... the problems we have found are with firms that give you an account". In fact, he was one among only 3 respondents who had had problems with accounts. But our readers are exacting.

For one, catalogues could be "massive". Range of goods offered was, for two, less than it used to be. Colours could be not as specified (3 complaints); fit of clothes could be poor (3); finish could be poor (2). No one reported non-delivery or substitutes; but 4 had had delivery problems, with delivery unpredictable (2), on to the doorstep (2) or to a wrong address (1). One complained of over-packaging, two found p-and-p rates to be high, and two had found extra charges, even VAT on the postage. "Return system not good", said 4; it has to be through a post office, return postage is not always refunded, and one firm even charges for returns. "Make your views on follow-up very

obvious, *and mean it*", warned one writer, while another took this opportunity to complain about "you have won" mail.

However, among the 106 organisations mentioned we found only 4 which received more brickbats than bouquets: Coopers of Stortford, Cosy Feet, Cotton Traders, and, oddly enough, *The Times* - but that was for plants. Plants indeed seem to be the trickiest mail-order purchases: "I've had mixed results with plants"; "one cannot specify a date for delivery of plants"; "I once bought plants from a *Times* offer; they were small, and not in good condition when they arrived; only one of the two survived"; "We once bought plants through a leaflet in *The Times*; they all died". The Daily Telegraph recently surveyed mailed plants, with similar results. Another warning was: "I would never buy furniture or household goods by mail order because of the difficulty of returning the parcels if unsuitable".

In general, nevertheless, one respondent summed up: "I am a devotee of mail-order shopping. I don't like 'proper' shopping - the shops are usually too hot - at home I can take my time, and it's easy to return things. It avoids parking and saves time".



Internet shopping: "Have you ever bought anything on the Internet?" we asked, and 40 replied "No". "Am worried re security", said one. Some explained "no access"; we can see that internet cafes don't suit everyone, neither the 4 who don't even shop by mail-order, nor the many who do that just for the sake of peace and quiet in their own homes. The 12 who replied "yes" have bought books (7), CDs (5), travel (4), food and drink (3), clothes (but only 2). There was one purchaser each for "computers" (sic!), a freezer, a fridge, a vacuum cleaner, a toy, insurance, "gifts", gas and electricity.

Only 5 reported problems with internet shopping. "It needs time to do properly and safely!" "Costs not clear - particularly with Malta lira rates". "Sometimes the secure sites are laborious to use; some sites throw you out; some firms do not stock or illustrate their usual items on their sites". "With both Tesco and Sainsburys, (a) surprisingly ordinary items are 'out of stock' and substitutes are not what we'd buy (but you can reject substitutes of course), (b) items are not actually delivered (but they do give refunds without question). A gas transfer took many weeks because of 'error in information system' at Amerada". "A friend had a purchase shown on his credit card several times over a couple of months".

Internet shopping has still quite a way to go, so far as OCG respondents indicate.

DID YOU KNOW?

Left Luggage

One of the results of the current anxiety within all travel and tourism companies is the suppression of left-luggage facilities, not only at Oxford railway station but, according to Enquiries there, "everywhere else in Oxford". This created a problem for a group of Czech teenagers who wanted to spend a day in Oxford during a round-Britain rail tour of nearly a fortnight, with corresponding amounts of luggage. Even the Youth Hostel, where they were quite willing to eat but hadn't been able to get overnight accommodation, wouldn't oblige. The organisation which would oblige is the other hostel, Oxford Backpackers, which the YH kindly phoned for them. (We featured both hostels in our Summer 2001 number). Oxford Backpackers, 9A Hythe Bridge Street, will accept left-luggage even from non-residents at £2 per person per day - but not necessarily per item, if two items can be tied together. Remember, however, that you have to climb a flight of stairs to start with.

Your five-digit mailsort number

We were asked about this a while ago by a member who, like the Chairman and Editor, finds one on her income-tax form and even on charity appeals. We could only tell her that there'd been an article about it in *New Scientist* a few years ago, which we hadn't been able to trace. But now the topic has come up in the question-and-answer section of *The Times*. It relates to the discount offered by Royal Mail for mail pre-sorted by the sender into geographical areas (the first 3 digits) and local sorting offices (the last 2). It can be followed by a barcode which represents your postcode and delivery point. Why then postcodes, asks another member? Well, they make it easier to remember one's own and sometimes even someone else's. It is alleged that they also help insurance companies,

which are said to be happier with OX2 than with OX4.

Reservoir Books

At 84 St Aldate's, this is a new cafe plus secondhand bookshop with a difference; the *Oxford Times* featured it on 14 June, and several of us have sussed it out since. The building is one of the oldest in Oxford, and the Council for the Preservation of England, OPT and similar bodies are very anxious that it should be restored. The shop and cafe form a publicity front and a kick-start. They are run charmingly by the organisers, Jonathan and Eleanor Ungar, and backed by Rewley House, Oxford University Press, Blackwell's, Routledge's and several Oxford University dons known to your Editor. The books for resale, chiefly literary and cultural, are donated, and, if you can offer more than you can carry, a van will call. "Coffee smelt excellent", comments one of our members; "leaf teas (good Darjeeling), some herbal teas, home cooking, vegetarian options, organic vegetables, soups and bakes". There are hopes that it may develop into a "civic and cultural centre" with museum exhibitions, classic film showings, an advice bureau and workshops on civic subjects, but emphatically not for academics only. At present it is closed on Mondays (though open Sundays 11.30 - 6.30).

Local Radio

The competition for the Oxford small-scale local radio licence which became available this summer resulted in a re-award to Fusion 107.9 FM.

Plastic Plant Pots

Notcutts Garden Centre at Nuneham Courtenay will accept and re-use these. Milletts Farm Centre at Frilford are thinking about doing the same.

WHICH?ERY

In the June *Which?* p8 surveyed swimming-baths - but none nearer to Oxford than Milton Keynes and Newbury.

P28 had tips on how to smarten up your old computer without replacing it.

P31 recommended a "worldwide bath plug" for travellers - but we haven't tested whether it's better than the satsuma recommended by *The Guardian* (our Issue 155 p7).

P49 surveyed ice creams.

In the July *Which?* p8 surveyed house surveyors, and found amazing casualness. "They won't inspect areas that are difficult to access, or if the vendor objects to their lifting fitted carpets or moving furniture..." "A property in Salisbury was described as having views over Winchester". A leak in a roof had been "missed out because the

house was so big"! You can complain to the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors; or the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators runs a Surveyors Arbitration Scheme.

P37 looked at farmers' markets, rather generally, but comparing some prices with those in supermarkets. Again, nowhere nearer to us than Newbury; has *Which?* no Oxford members, or does it find Oxford too hard to travel into?

P42 looked at the "nine most visited" theme parks in the UK: Legoland at Windsor, two in Surrey, one in Cornwall, one in Derbyshire, two in Staffordshire and two further north. For good measure they threw in Disneyland.

P60 featured a two-year-old who broke a vase in a shop and whose mother was charged the full retail price. A lawyer advised that they were liable only for the actual loss to the shop.

Four pages of the August *Which?* (8-11) warn that "we may be contaminated with more than 300 man-made chemicals ... in air fresheners ... shower gels ... children's plastic toys ... nail varnishes ... baby bottles ... food cans..." "It would be unrealistic", is the conclusion, "to stop buying products we use every day.. However, if you're worried about particular chemicals..." read the label, contact the manufacturer, change the baby's

bottle regularly, and try cloth nappies.

P12 has the simplest plan yet for disposing of your old mobile phone: Oxfam shops will now take them.

Advising on house insurance, p21 has a delightful cartoon, sadly unsigned, including a crocodile popping up from the loo.

P26 surveys household scales.

Pp51-53 advise, we suspect much too simply, on making your own will.

SAINSBURYS IN MAGDALEN STREET

The new Sainsburys, one of the ground-floor shops beneath the remodelled Debenhams, opened on the day England drew with Nigeria in the World Cup. By around 4 pm, when your reporter looked in, the single queue (which works as in some Post Offices; you wait till your till number is called out) was stretching back between aisles. Baskets rather than trolleys seem to be preferred, but there were some trolleys with tall thief-deterrent poles.

The store seems to be pitched at City-centre workers, students, tourists and bus travellers, with emphasis on prepared foods and snacks, greengroceries, canned and bottled soft and alcoholic drinks (more space for wines than beers), and brand-names rather than Sainsburys' own brands (eg breakfast cereals). There were no Fairtrade teas or instant coffees, only medium-roast ground coffee; no low-energy light-bulbs, but Sainsburys' "Revive" recycled kitchen and toilet rolls were available. There were also newspapers, stationery items, CDs and videos; in fact, rather the mix you'd expect in an "eight till late" shop. Monday-Saturday opening is 11 pm (so you can pick up items after a theatre visit or concert) and

Sunday opening will be from 11 am to 5 pm. There is a cash machine outside.

Despite the long queue, not all the 18 tills were staffed. A non-buyer, leaving, said, "such a queue, it's not worth it!" Your reporter was surprised they weren't serving hot drinks, as happens in the Liverpool Street Station store. Apparently this Sainsburys is larger than most of their local stores, presumably to meet the needs of Oxford's choosy customers, and perhaps to replace the vanished Cornmarket Co-op.

Another OCG member thought prices a little higher than in the Westgate Sainsburys, perhaps because of the higher rates and longer opening hours. But variations may also depend on the product concerned; for instance, the Westgate branch had dearer bananas, because its were organic, and a much wider choice of apples, both cheaper and dearer than Magdalen Street ones. It will be interesting to see if there are changes in the merchandise mix as the store "beds in". And how, if at all, will Covered Market food shops be affected?

THE INTERTECH TESTING SERVICE

The National Consumer Federation arranged a July visit for members to the Intertech Testing Service (ITS) Research and Testing Centre in Milton Keynes, unfortunately at too short notice for the June magazine to mention it. The Research and Testing element of the centre used to be that of the Consumer Association, while ITS itself is one of the leading organizations for the testing and authorization of electrotechnical products, granting approval marks for safety. It was interesting to hear about the changes in consumer affairs over the last four decades that have brought about this year's merger of the two centres.

In the sixties, when the Consumer Association (CA) began its work, testing of appliances had to be robust and thorough - partly because there was little consumer protection; partly because products were less reliable; partly because of challenges from manufacturers who weren't too keen on informed criticism. Now we, as consumers, can be less concerned about the physical reliability of our washing machines and irons, but are more and more conscious of aspects of consumerism such as

user-friendliness, labelling and guarantees; and there is a growing concern over "service" organisations, eg transport, the NHS, catering and financial services. This trend is, I think, reflected in the contents of *The Oxford Consumer* and other such group magazines.

Whereas TTS's key expertise is safety, the CA now has a broader approach which includes performance - how well does something do the job which it is designed for? how easy is it to use the product or service? etc. Thus the April merger brought the consumer research experience of the CA staff alongside the scientific and technical skills of ITS, research being a common element in both groups.

We felt privileged because much of what we saw in the laboratories, or were told about, was confidential for obvious reasons. Our pads and pens were quickly put away as we began our tour of the site. As always on such visits, it was easy to go around exclaiming, "I'd never have thought about that", or, "Yes, of course, I should have realised that". The ITS Research and Testing Centre

is no different from any other body, immense or tiny, when it comes to EU regulation! So, where once the standards were set for UK products and services, now much of the testing has to be set against EU Regulations and sometimes international ones. The "bibles" carried around by the scientists and technicians contain statutory requirements as dictated by Brussels.

The range of clients of Milton Keynes is very broad - UK government, European and international consumer organizations, international agencies, manufacturers, retailers and, of course, *Which?* magazine. With the enormous growth of "own-brand" labelling of consumer products, large

retailers look for advice on which of a range of say washing machines offered by a manufacturer is the best for their in-house label. Government departments want advice on energy efficiency. International agencies such as the World Health Organisation ask for help in testing items like pumps for water provision and refrigerators for vaccine storage, which will work efficiently in harsh environments with few repair facilities and non-existent or unreliable electricity supplies.

We must thank the NCF for organizing such a fascinating trip, and thank everyone at ITS for time and interesting explanations

IN BRIEF

Obituary

We regret to record the death of our long-standing member Mrs Heather Lund. She was a leading light of OCG in its early years, and particularly in preparing our Schools Guides of the early 1970's and 1980's. She remained a faithful member until her death in June. We send our condolences to her husband.

Accident to a Bus User

Since our report in our Summer issue we have continued to correspond with both the National Federation of Bus Users (01865 558424, or PO Box 320, Portsmouth, P05 3SD) and with Stagecoach. The latter now tell us that their seven new buses with "revised layouts of handrails" run on the route from Carfax to Blackbird Leys (fleet numbers 943 to 949). They have invited us to look at one if we can get together in early September.

Meanwhile the NFBU has a useful leaflet "Bad Experience on the Buses? This is how you should complain". It turns on both where the service operates (not necessarily where you yourself live) and what you want to complain about (of course after trying the bus company):

- 1) fares, times, ticketing, unreliability, unpunctuality, staff behaviour, inadequate information?
- 2) no service, or service being taken off?
- 3) "serious infringement of safety"?
- 4) bus stops, shelters or stations?

For all four in *Greater London*, there is a central watchdog, the London Transport Users Committee, Clements House, 14-18 Gresham Street, London EC2V 7PR. *Northern Ireland* has a similar watchdog, the General Consumer Council for NI.

Elsewhere, for (2), you can try the local council or Passenger Transport Executive - it seems our nearest PTE is in Birmingham. For (3) there are Traffic Commissioners; again, our nearest is in Birmingham. For (4) it will be the local council, unless there is a PTE or unless the bus operators themselves own a bus station - the council will tell you. But for (1) there's no appeals body - try the NFBU itself. (It has also a Welsh office).

NHS

An OCG member asks us to draw attention to the existence of a non-charitable organisation, London Health Emergency, which opposes the Private Finance Initiative. Its leaflet is obtainable from Unit 6, Ivebury Court, 325 Latimer Road, London W10 6RA (020 8960 8002, or feedback@healthemergency.org.uk) or from Dr M. Heatley, 12 Oxford Road, Old Marston, Oxford OX3 9PQ.

The Divinity Road Problem

Another member, concerned about Divinity Road residents' wish for still further "traffic-calming", wrote to the County pleading that Cheney Lane residents (not all students) "are not rats. We are mice trying, sometimes desperately, to get into and out of our own hole..." She received a kind reply from the Group Manager, Transport Planning: "I would just like to assure you that we are aware of the need to have in mind access to Granville Court in the consideration of any traffic management changes in the vicinity... A study of an area of East Oxford encompassing Divinity Road is to be commissioned. This will involve public consultation..."

The Oxford Cycle Workshop

Two of our members have now visited this community recycling project at 39 Magdalen Road (01865 204799), featured by the Oxford Times in June. It does seem to be a worthwhile little enterprise, accepting donations of bikes in need of repair, giving work or work experience to people who can repair them, and then selling the bikes at low cost.

Another Scam

Our readers are unlikely to be council house tenants, but they may know people who are. Do warn them that if they want to buy their home, they don't need to pay a company to help them - the local housing authority will provide a booklet, a form and guidance, all free.

A USER-FRIENDLY WAY TO CHANGE YOUR BANK?

by Barbara Green

The financial press advises us to monitor our bank's performance, and to shop around for better rates and/or service if dissatisfied. I was a "lazy" account holder, keeping money in a High Street Bank current account that didn't pay interest (except for a few pence). In a way, however, I did illustrate the standard caveat associated with comments on personal finance - to remember that we all have different circumstances and different needs.

For example, I'd lived abroad for many years, (before e-mail and internet banking), so having a person who knew me well on the end of a telephone line was arguably more important than an extra x% interest. Once I was spending more time in England, however, I thought I should review the situation, particularly as I felt that my High Street Bank had become increasingly bureaucratic in recent years, with no old-style branch manager who knew his or her customers personally and could handle their business without constant referral to central departments.

Many people are reluctant to change their bank, believing that transferring accounts, with their associated Direct Debits and Standing Orders, can be fraught with difficulties, even when using a "transfer pack" designed to mitigate problems. I'd heard of a relatively painless way of doing it, which I followed. The basic idea is to run a new account with a new bank alongside the old one, so that the transfer of regular credits and debits can be made in a sequence that suits us and is under our own control.

I opened a Halifax Current Account with the minimum £100 deposit. While waiting for an account number, a chequebook and card, I got blank Direct Debit forms from existing payees to notify change of bank details. I had no Standing Orders.

I then transferred some "spare" cash held in the old account, (ie cash not needed to cover immediate automatic payments), which immediately attracted interest. Transfer activities depend on personal circumstances. Regular sources of income must be switched in a sequence

that allows the similarly switched Direct Debits and Standing Orders to be met.

When there are no remaining credits or debits due to or from the old account, check the remaining balance - easily done on a mini-statement from a hole-in-the-wall. Write a letter closing the account, as always keeping a copy yourself. By this time the balance should be small enough for you to draw it in cash at the counter and hand over the letter in exchange. Of course the branch where you keep your account may not be the one whose "hole" you use to draw cash, check balances etc (for example if you've moved without changing branches). It wasn't in my case, so I paid a cheque for the final amount into my nearby Halifax account, and then posted the letter to the old bank telling them when to expect clearance of the cheque so that the empty account could be closed.

Only one hiccup - a Company Registrar didn't record the new account details for payment of some dividends. Fortunately the old account was still open. Otherwise they would have probably rechecked my details when the credit was rejected and written to me for further instructions. So it wasn't the end of the world!

No sooner had I opened my new account than I wanted to buy foreign currency and to sell some shares. The appropriate telephone departments of the Halifax did both, very satisfactorily.

- Another member comments: "I switched from Barclays to Abbey National because the latter provide - at least currently - 3% interest if you have £1000 or more paid into your account each month, and as I have a USS pension of over £1000 that was easy. Your old bank will provide a list of standing orders and a list of direct debits.

The key point in the article is to keep two accounts going. How much effort a change is depends upon how many different kinds of payment go into the account, because all need separate notifications. If there are many, then it is very tedious".

RECYCLING TIPS

- (1) Keep junk-mail return envelopes to use with "save trees" economy labels; use blank sides for letters (to suitable correspondents!)
- (2) Large plastic pop bottles can be recycled as a working rocket toy or seed/nut bird feeder (cheap conversion kits from garden shops). Cut the tops to protect plant cuttings, or as anti-slug protectors over small plants; use middle section as slug collar; use bottom as drip-catcher under houseplants.
- (3) Save plastic postbags from magazines and catalogues to use as mini bin-liners or see-through protection for small items and documents like appliance instructions and guarantees. Cellophane wrappers off greetings cards make important till-slips more conspicuous (staple them to guarantee safety).
- (4) Rectangular plastic boxes with see-through lids make compact, stackable storage for screws, torch bulbs and other small items (remember to label them!)
- (5) Watch outside greengrocers and at markets for deep stack-or-nest plastic boxes for tidier storage of t-shirts, underwear, socks, papers;

- or collect the shallower lattice trays for papers and herb-drying.
- (6) Also from outside greengrocers and restaurants; large expanded polystyrene boxes make mini cold-frames (see-through lids can be easily improvised). Polystyrene loose-filling in delivery boxes can be used at the bottom of plant tubs for lightweight drainage; shredded paper can be pet-bedding; also, if mixed in with dead leaves, grass cuttings and other soggy vegetation, it makes for crumblier compost.

- (8) *Don't* try to compost citrus peel (it is too acid and grows nasty mould); put the halves out (peel side up) to attract slugs away from your seedlings.

PHANTOM PHONE PHENOMENA

by Ken Frere

This piece is about phantom phone calls, but it starts with unsolicited "telesales". You know the sort of thing:

"Hello, my name is Darren. If I said you could have one of your windows replaced free, which one would you choose?"

"Hello, my name is Tracy. You have won a fabulous £2000 holiday".

"Hello, my name is Sharon. I am doing some research into home improvements".

The worst thing about these calls is that they always come when you are in the middle of a meal, or when the Detective Chief Inspector has just caught up with you in working out who committed the seventeen gruesome murders. We had been meaning to register with the Telephone Preference Service to get rid of these calls, when the phantom telephone calls forced our hand.

The phone rings. When you pick up the handset the line is dead. Who was it? First time round, you think that someone has misdialled your number and realised the mistake before you respond. The second time, you think it might have been Bill Sykes casing the joint to check whether you are-- open for burglary. The third time you begin to get paranoid; is someone dialling your number maliciously?

On the next occasion we dialled 1471 and were given an 01908 number. That is the area code for Milton Keynes. No offence, but we don't know anyone, or any firm, in Milton Keynes. Applying Keynesian analysis, we worked out that only a very stupid Bill Sykes would oblige with his telephone number. On the next occasion, dialling 1471 told us that "The caller has withheld his

telephone number" (so was it a different caller?).

Now we were worried, so we looked up the 'Malicious Calls' page (p 15) in the BT telephone directory. Dialling 150 takes you to a long menu, so avoid it. 0800 666 700 takes you to a recorded message about malicious calls. 0800 661441 takes you to a human being. Our human being was really there to handle genuinely malicious problems, but she solved our problem at once.

Darren, Tracy and Sharon are probably involved, but they are too busy to dial your number, so a computer does it for them. If, when your phone rings, D, T and S are already handling calls, the computer stops ringing your number and the line goes dead. This keeps D, T and S fully occupied on their useful work for the community; and you had to get up to answer the phone anyway.

Are there any remedies?

Registering with the Telephone Preference Service (0845 070 0707) seems to work with the live calls. We had a quick confirmation, and registration takes about four weeks for the TPs suppression file to become effective. If you then receive an unwanted call, ask the caller to give his or her telephone number, then report this and the name of the firm to the TPS for action. If no telephone number is given, try dialling 1471 at the end of the call. There is some doubt about the TPS being able to stop computer-dialled calls. They can do nothing if the firm is prepared to ignore the Telecommunications (Data Protection and Privacy) Regulations, and some of these calls can originate in the Far East (ah, technology!).

JUST FOR FUN

When sussing out Notcutts (see page 9) we caught The Phone Book making the classic mistake:

Nott - see also Knott

Knott - see also Nott

with no further entries under either heading, so far as the Business Numbers go. There are, however, entries among the Residential Numbers. We hope BT won't catch our indexer out.

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Mail Boxes Etc	W01 p15	- Transport Strategy	SU99 p4; A99 p4; W99 p8,11,13; SPO p3; SUO p3; AO p
Mail order buying	WO p13		WO p3; SPO1 p11; W01 p7; SP02 p5
Markets		Oxpat	SP02 p9
- Covered	W99 p6	Packaging	A01 p10
- Farmers'	SUO p9; AO p15; WO p16; SPOT p15; SU02 p10,11	Parking	A99 p4; SUO p7
- Gloucester Green	SUO p9; AO p15	- Permits	SPOT p8
- White Paper	SPO p 12	Pedestrians	W99 p13; W01 p16; SP02 p9; and see
- Women's Institute	SPO p6		Oxford Transport Strategy
Marks & Spencers	W98 p10; W01 p7; SP02 p14,15	People's Panel	SU99 p5; A99 p14; W99 p14; SPO p5; AO p16; WO <i>p1b</i> ;
Marmalade	SP99 p11		A01 p13; SU02 p12
Meadhams	WO p11	Perm	WO p12
Measurement Units	A99 p7	Persil	A99 p10
Millennium Problem	SP99 p15; SU99 p11; A99 p13; SPO p2,5; SUO p15	Pets	A01 p5,13; SP02 p12; SU02 p15
Mobile phones	SPOT p9,10; A01 p16; SP02 p12	Phones	see British Telecom, Mobile
Music products	SP02 p11	Photocopying	SU02 p13
National Bus Users Fedn	SUO p10; AO p14; WO p16; SU01 p6	Pickpockets	SPO1 p10
National Central Heating		Plumbers	SU01 p8
Office	AO p10	Plymouth	A01 p14
National Consumer Council	SU99 p4; W99 p14; AO p8; WO p7; SU01 p10; A01 p7	POAC	SP01 p9; and see Postal Services
National Criminal		Postal Preference Service	WO <i>p1b</i> ; SP01 p7; SU01 p13
Intelligence Service	SU02 p16	Postal Services	SU99 p3,14; A99 p10; W99 p4; SPO p3; SUO p10; AO p5;
National Health Service	SPOT p5; A01 p3; W01 p8; Sp02 p4; SU02 p7		WO p16; A01 p8; W01 p4,15; SP02 p7,10,13; SU02 p9
Netherlands	W01 p14	Potholes	AO p5
NFCG (now NCF)	W99 p6; WO p7; SU01 p10; A01 p7	Poverty	SP99 p3; W99 p3; SPO p11; SUO p14; SP02 p9
- AGM	A98 p16; A99 p5; WO p7; A01 p7	Prices, display of	SPOT p15

Prize Draws	A99 pll; SU02 p16	Store Design	SU99 p6
Projects Meetings, see OCG		Street Fittings, see Damage	
Puddles	SUO p7	Summertown	AO p3
Qualitas	A99 p3; SPO1 p2	Sundora Foods	SPO1 p14
Quarrying	A99 p6; W99 p6; SPO p4	Supermarkets	SU02 p9,10
Raging Grannies	SP02 p10	Taxes	SP99 p3; A99 p12
Railways	A99 p6; W99 p6; SUO p5; A01 p7	Telephone companies	SP99 p14; SU99 p13; A99 pll; SUO p15; and see British Telecom
RAISE	SP02 p5	- codes	SP99 p15
Rats	SP01 p14	- Preference Service	A96 p6
Readers Digest	SP02 p15; SU02 p16	- services to customers	SU99 p15; SPOT p9
Ready Prepared Meals	WO p9; A01 p10	Tesco's	SP99 p11; SU99 p15
Recommended Services, see OCG		Thumbprints	W01 p13
Recycling	A01 p11	Tidy Britain	SU01 p8; A01 p16
Repairs	SU01 p9	Tippex	SPOT p14
- Radio	SU01 p8	Toothbrushes	SU02 p12
Restaurants	SU01 p8; SU02 p15; and see Lunch	Trading Standards Dept	SP99 p2; A99 p8; SUO p6; AO p6; WO p13; SPOT p15; SU01 p8; W01 p13; SP02 p6,7; SU02 p12
Rose Hill	W99 p9; SUO p7; AO p4; W01 p12	Transponders	W99 p3
Royal Garden Party	A99 p15	Transport	SP99 p3,5,11; SPO pll; SUO p3; SPO1 pll; and see Oxford, Railways
Russia	WO p12	Unsolicited Mail, see Mailing Preference Service	
R White Cabinets	SUO p16	Utilities, Privatised	A99 p6; W99 p6; SPO p4; AO p5
Sainsburys	A99 p11; WO p5; W01 p7,15	Vets, see Pets	
Satsumas		Village Shops	SP99 p13
"Screwdrivers"	SU01 p9	Vivat Trust	AO p6
Seating	WO p8	Voting	SP99 p12; A99 p14; SUO p12
SEEDA	SP02 p4	Von Engel, Ilse	A99 p3; W99 pll
Shops	SP99 p13; A99 p11; AO p12; WO p5,8,11; SU02 p10	Westgate	W99 p6,7; SPO p6; SUO p14; AO p3,4; SPOT p15; SU01 p5; A01 p5; SP02 p7
Shop deliveries	SP99 p3; SUO p7; SU02 p10	Wheel Clamping	A01 p3
Sleeping Bags	A99 p9	Which?	now in every issue
Smoking	WO p14	You & Yours	WO p8
Snap-Map Ltd	SUO p15	Young Consumers	SP99 p4; SPO1 p9; SU01 p8
Social Services	SP99 p5	Youth Hostel	SU01 p13; SP02 p8
Southern Electric	SU99 p6; A99 p6; W99 p14; AO p7; WO pll		
Squashes	SPO p5		
St Clement's Street	A01 p12		
St Giles' Street	SU01 p2; A01 p15; W01 p7; SU02 p8		
Staying Put	WO p12		

NCF AND THE COMMUNICATIONS BILL

We recall that this Bill was published in early May (too late for us to treat it in our Summer magazine). Its proposals include the replacement of OFTEL and four other bodies by a single one, OFCOM (the Office for Communications), and the four regional Advisory Committees on Telecommunications by a single Consumer Panel. The May-June *Consumer News* commented: "We will have lost a great deal of national representation". NCF is concerned enough

about this to make it the subject of its Day Conference on Saturday 14 September, from 9 am at University College, London.

This conference is part of NCF's residential AGM at the same place, starting at 5 on the previous day, Friday the 13th. This magazine will reach you too late to book for this, but of course you can drop in on either or both days if you don't expect meals.